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S E R M O N

Preached before the HONOURABLE

HOUSE of COMMONS,

ON

THURSDAY, JANUARY XXX, 1772.

*Veneris, 31<sup>o</sup> Die Januarii, 1772.*

ORDERED,

**T**HAT the Thanks of this House be given to the Reverend Doctor *Nowell*, for the Sermon by him preached Yesterday, before this House, at *St. Margaret's, Westminster*; and that he be desired to print the same; and that Sir *William Dolben*, Mr. *Page*, and Mr. *Alexander Popham*, do acquaint him therewith.

J. HATSELL,

*Cl. Dom. Com.*



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ST. MARGARET's, WESTMINSTER,  
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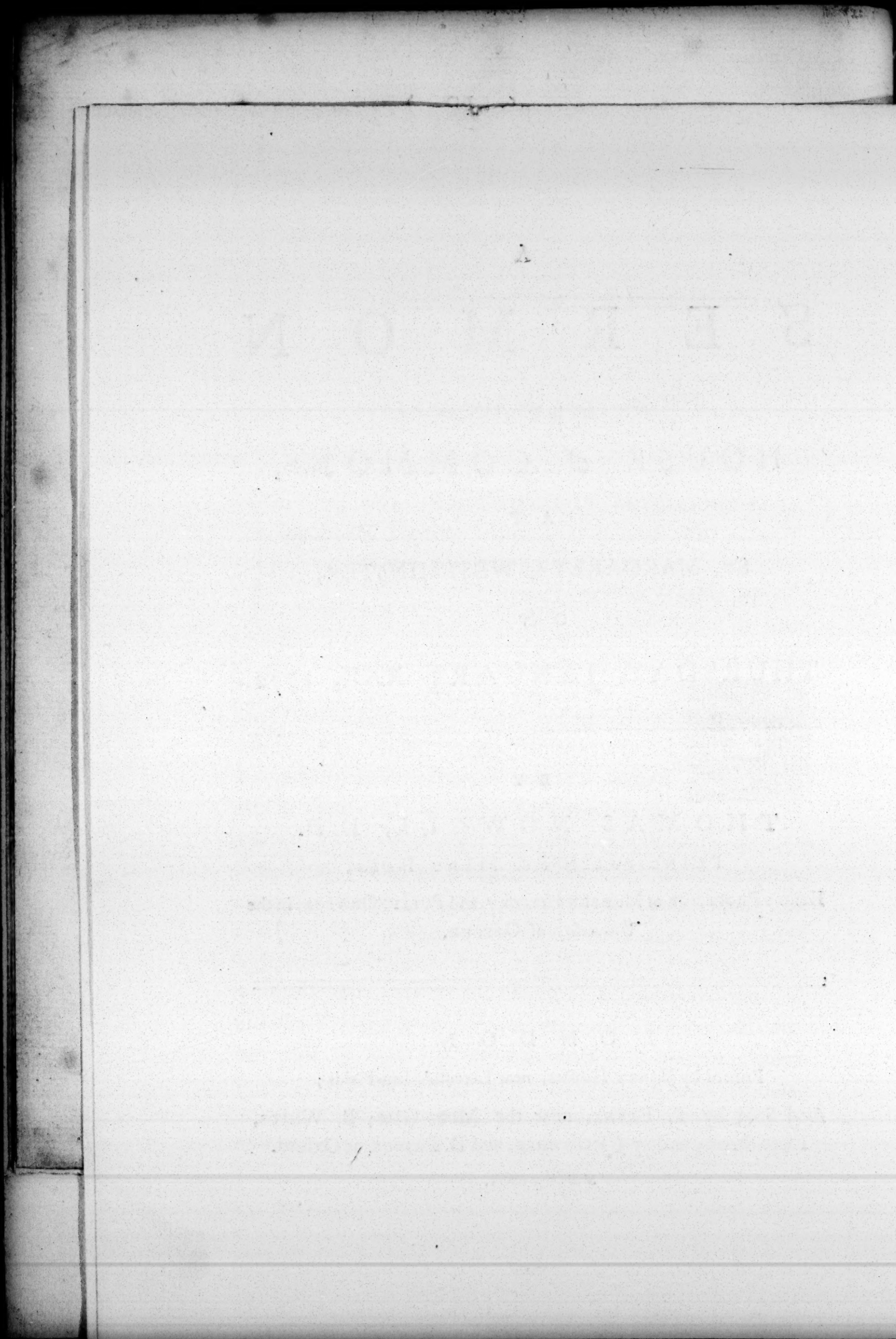
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B Y  
T H O M A S N O W E L L, D. D.  
PRINCIPAL of ST. MARY HALL,  
KING's PROFESSOR of MODERN HISTORY, and PUBLIC ORATOR, in the  
Univerfity of OXFORD,

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L O N D O N :  
Printed by HENRY HUGHS, near Lincoln's-Inn-Fields ;  
And Sold by T. PAYNE, near the Mews-Gate; B. WHITE,  
Fleet-Street; and by J. FLETCHER, and D. PRINCE, at Oxford.

M.DCC.LXXII.

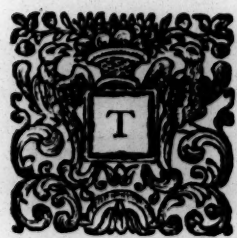




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NUMBERS xvi. 3.

YE TAKE TOO MUCH UPON YOU, SEEING ALL THE CONGREGATION IS HOLY, EVERY ONE OF THEM, AND THE LORD IS AMONG THEM. WHEREFORE THEN LIFT YE UP YOURSELVES ABOVE THE CONGREGATION OF THE LORD ?



HIS was the language of Korah and his company, when they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. Neither the rod of God, that ensign of delegated Majesty, in the hand of the one ; nor the oil, the mitre, the holy crown, those sacred emblems, which adorned the head of the other, could protect them from the strife of these seditious tongues. Tho' they had seen the signs and wonders, which Moses wrought in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea ; tho' the unruly waves had confessed his power, and the stony rock had before their eyes at his word given forth his water, yet could he not appease the rage, or still the madness of this people. Their faces were harder than the rock ; their obdurate hearts knew not how to relent ;

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neither mercies nor judgements could engage their obedience.

The Jews indeed are represented as a perverse generation, a stiff-necked people; from whence we might be induced to hope that this murmuring and discontent, this impatience of submission to divine authority, was the effect of some peculiar obstinacy, which characterized the genius of that nation; did not reflection and experience convince us, that ambition, envy, and malice, are not the growth of any particular country, but the genuine offspring of depraved nature, shooting up in every age and nation from that root of bitterness, which interwove itself into the human constitution at the fall of Man.—Nor can we wonder that a motive, which tempted the innocence, and seduced the virtue of our first parent, when in a state of perfection, should have a fatal influence over his fallen race; or that pride, and a lust of superiority, which raised rebellion in Heaven, should create discord and confusion upon earth.

There is in man a principle of self-will, which is naturally impatient of controul, and disdains subjection. This principle discovers itself in the waywardness of our very childhood, and, if suffered to grow up, neither restrained by the hand of discipline, nor moderated by a sense of that utility which arises to individuals from a due subordination in society, would be perpetually breaking forth  
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into acts of violence and oppression.—Nor are these restraints sufficient to check its impetuosity. The force of education is too weak to counteract the prevalence of irregular appetites ; whilst all sense of utility arising from good order is lost in those, whose selfish and sordid views are best gratified in times of public confusion and distress.

It has therefore been the wisdom of all communities to guard the public peace, and protect the private property of their several members by the institution of laws : which, being founded in the depravity of human nature, and taking their rise from the enormities they are intended to correct, may be conceived, when properly applied, to be an effectual remedy for those evils which distract society, and disturb the repose of nations. And indeed of all human expedients, they are the best calculated to promote this desirable end. Being made for the lawless and disobedient, they are armed with sanctions which may enforce obedience, and influence minds lost to every other motive of justice and humanity. They address themselves to the most sensible of all the passions, and urge their observance by arguments, which most powerfully engage our attention ; they speak to our fears. Not only shame and disgrace, but pains and penalties are annexed to the violation of them. The sword of the Magistrate is drawn to execute wrath upon the children of disobedience ; to be a terror to evil works ;

to repress the violence, and stop the fury of the oppressor.

Could the efficacy of human laws extend itself to every action, and their influence be uniformly exerted over every member of the community, peace might indeed flourish under their protection, and righteousness be the fruits thereof. But no such perfection can be hoped for from any thing of human composition. The powers of man are narrow, and contracted in their operation, reaching only to the few objects which more immediately attract their notice; weak and feeble in their execution, frequently borne down, and destroyed by those evils they attempt to suppress. Secret vice eludes the hand of civil justice; whilst more audacious villany bids open defiance to its authority. The ordinances therefore of man, however well concerted, are of themselves ineffectual to secure the peace and good order of society; and the very foundations of government would soon be out of course, were there no other obligations upon men, but what human policy can devise, to give it stability and support.

In order to establish government upon a firm and durable basis, recourse must be had to principles not of mere temporal concern; to motives which can reach the heart, and influence the conscience; to a power higher than that of man. Conscious of this, the wisest Hea-  
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then Lawgivers have ever introduced into their systems of polity the superintendence of some superior Being, which, however idly feigned, or ridiculously represented, according to the vanity of their several imaginations, yet, under the various disguises of wood or stone, of reptile or insect, was still supposed to be armed with power to avenge the violation of those laws, which claimed the sanction of its tutelage and protection. Without some invention of this kind, which Nature, retaining a faint remembrance of her first allegiance to the Supreme Being, suggested; there could be no confidence in words, no faith in oaths, no security of the People's obedience to their Governors, or of their fidelity to each other.

To these Gods of their Country they appealed in all cases of controversy, as the protectors of truth and innocence, and the avengers of perfidy and guilt. If then the impressions of a false religion were necessary to retain men in a state of obedience, with what superior efficacy must the dictates of the true one operate upon their minds?—if the imaginary terrors of a fabulous Deity could influence the actions, and regulate the conduct of its deluded votaries, how powerfully must the presence of the real and true God act upon the consciences of those, who live under a sense of his all-seeing Providence, who acknowledge him to be infinite in wisdom, justice, and power?

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When men consider themselves placed in their several subordinate stations, not by mere chance, or by any compact or agreement of their own framing, but by the will of Him who is the fountain of government, the supreme Lord of heaven and earth; when they consider that all authority, dominion, and power, are his prerogative, and derived from him to those, whom his Providence has delegated to be his representatives upon earth; chearful duty, and willing obedience, will be the natural result of such reflections. To minds under this persuasion, the ordinances of man will recommend themselves to be, what they really are, the ordinances of God; and the Magistrate, under this character, will appear venerable and awful, as the Minister of God.

So close is the connection between government and religion, so necessary the dependence of the one upon the other, that without this sacred band, all civil union would be dissolved; and mankind, given over to their own misrule, like the jarring elements of matter, uncontrouled by that Almighty Power which called them into being, and order, would by perpetually warring with one another reduce all things into a state of anarchy and confusion. For the storms and tempests, which deform the face of nature, do but faintly represent the fury and rage of those passions which rend the human breast.—But, thanks be to God, “ He who ruleth



ruleth the raging of the sea, and the noise of the waves, stilleth also the madness of the people." By the secret workings of his Holy Spirit, He turneth the hearts of men, like the rivers of water, whithersoever he listeth ; making them kindly affectioned one to another, gentle, easy to be intreated, ready to forgive ; meek, patient, obedient to authority, attentive to every call of social or civil duty.

These are the blessings derived to society from a sense of God's over-ruling Providence ; these the happy effects of religion, when professed in sincerity and truth. It is the best support of government, and the most solid foundation upon which the throne can be established. But the most fatal consequences have ever attended the abuse and perversion of it ; insomuch that if we search the annals of history, we shall find that most of the miseries and calamities, in which mankind have involved one another, have taken their rise from a false zeal for the honour of God, and a specious pretence of promoting his service.—Strife, debate, contention, and every evil work, have flowed from this source of peace and good will ; it has been used to countenance fraud, rapine, rebellion, and murder.

When men of corrupt hearts, and heated imaginations, work themselves up into a persuasion that they are the peculiar favorites of Heaven, and fancy the delusions of  
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their own distempered brain to be the inspirations of the Deity, they are no longer to be holden by any tye of civil or moral obligation. Equal to the rest of mankind upon the common foot of nature, and distinguished from them by extraordinary marks of divine favour, they despise the ordinances of men, those beggarly elements (as they term them) which hold the unenlightened world in subjection, and feel in themselves an exemption from those duties which are derived from human authority ; every exertion of which appears to them an act of violence offered to their conscience, and an infringement of that liberty, which their unruly appetites, under the disguise of divine impulse, have proclaimed to them. Talk you of justice to these men ? their own conceptions are the only measure of it.—Of obedience ? they will tell you, it is due to God only. Nor do they stop here ; for having made their own enthusiastic notions the standard of divine truth, the dictates of nature are suppressed, and the voice of revelation silenced, or made to speak in conformity to that infallible oracle erected in their own breast. Here they pay their blind devotion, at this altar they offer up their daily sacrifice of pride and self-conceit ; setting at nought the lively oracles of God, forsaking his altar, and doing despite to his Holy Spirit. The Text furnishes us with a remarkable instance of this spirit of infatuation in men, whose obligations to obedience arose not from the common blessings of Providence, but from signs and won-



ders wrought in their deliverance. God had brought them forth from the house of their bondage with a mighty hand ; He had divided the Red Sea to make a way for them to escape ; He had fed them with manna in the wilderness, giving them bread from heaven ; He had gathered them with his arm, and carried them in his bosom. Such stupendous instances of divine power and love would naturally have excited in generous breasts the warmest resentments of gratitude and duty, would have called forth the voice of thanksgiving, and the song of praise. But to minds swoln with pride they only furnished matter of self-applause, feeding their vanity, and flattering their ambition. The signal favour of Heaven implied, in their over-weening opinion, singular merit in themselves ; whose extraordinary holiness, they fancied, had rendered them the peculiar objects of the divine regard. Every blessing conferred upon them enlarged their desires, and inflamed their insatiable appetites ; “ Lust came upon them, says the holy Psalmist, in the wilderness, and they tempted God in the desert.”—Every infliction of punishment raised their discontent and resentment—“ they murmured in their tents, and hearkened not to the voice of his words.” Till at length the spirit of discord, no longer to be restrained, broke out into open rebellion. “ Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, rose up before Moses with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, men of renown ; and they gathered themselves together against Moses, and against Aaron,

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and said unto them, "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: Wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?"

What was the event of this dangerous insurrection the sacred history informs us. The Almighty, to vindicate his injured honour, and avenge himself of those wicked blasphemers, who had assumed his holy name to justify their rebellion against him, arose in terrible majesty. "The glory of the Lord appeared unto all the congregation; and the Lord said unto Moses, and unto Aaron, Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." Accordingly a sudden and swift destruction overwhelmed them.—"The earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and they went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the congregation."

What would probably have been the event, had not the Almighty interposed, we may learn from the history of this day; when men of like principles, wearing the sacred garb of religion, and calling themselves the Saints of the Lord, under the sanctified pretext of establishing Christ's kingdom, trampled upon authority, broke down the fences of law and justice, violated the ordinances of religion, abolished government, and at length imbrued their hands in the blood of their king.

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In vain shall we look for the beginning of these evils from any real or pretended grievances, from any undue stretches of prerogative, from any abuse of royal power, those favourite topics upon which the enemies of our constitution so vehemently declaim. No; whatever colour these pretences might lend to rebellion, the groundwork of it was more deeply laid in the principles of the times, in the factious zeal, and turbulent spirit of men devoted to enthusiasm, frenzy, and madness.

Would you trace it to its first source, you must go back to the times which immediately succeeded the Reformation. That glorious work, by the gracious providence of God, was no sooner effected, but, like other blessings of Heaven, it was abused to the worst of purposes. The vine which the Lord had planted, had no sooner taken root in the land, but an evil weed sprung up under its shade, and interwove itself in its branches; checking the growth, and blasting the fruit of the tree which supported it.

The yoke of Popery, under which our forefathers had groaned, being now removed from the neck of the people, and the liberty of the Gospel proclaimed to them, one might have hoped, that a sense of their wonderful deliverance from more than Egyptian bondage, would have inspired them with one heart and one voice to glorify the God of their salvation. But instead of unity, tenfold discord arose; instead of conformity, schism

in various shapes distracted the church, and rent the body of Christ. Men of headstrong passions, who knew not how to value the greatness of the blessing they had received, like the rebellious Israelites, waxed wanton and kicked; they spurned at all order, disdained subordination, despised government; and under the plea of liberty of conscience, gave themselves up to the wildest conceits of fanaticism and frenzy. From the affected gravity of their deportment, the gloomy cast of their countenance, and their pretences to a more pure form of divine worship than that established in the church, they acquired the name of Puritans; a turbulent sect, whose very principles were full of rancour and violence.

Their ungovernable passions were for a while checked by the moderating hand of a Queen, whose vigilance, activity, and resolution, gave stability to her government, and distinguished the annals of her reign.

But the affairs of Scotland were more favourable to their designs. The reins of government were in the hand of a princess, whose indiscretion and misfortunes raised the compassion of her friends, and the insolence of her enemies. The state was weakened by factions, and the foundations of the reformed church shaken by the unhappy attachment of the sovereign to the superstition of the religion in which she had been educated. These times of distraction opened a way to the aspiring views of men, who, under a pretence of new modelling  
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the church, assumed to themselves all that authority of which Popery had been stript, and upon the ruins of Romish tyranny erected their own.

If the Pope stiled himself the head of the church, they, tho' they abolished the title, retained the power of it to themselves, becoming many Heads, and Lords over God's heritage; summoning the Bishops \* to their tribunal, subjecting them to their censures, and at length prohibiting the exercise of the episcopal office under pain of excommunication; thus throwing down the pillars of the church, upon which it had rested for ages, and placing themselves in their room.

If the Pope claimed a jurisdiction over princes, their claims were not inferior, but more rigorously exerted, even to the imprisoning and deposing of their own lawful sovereign.

If the Pope absolved subjects from their allegiance, they could upon every pretence sound the trumpet of rebellion, and compel them to engage in a solemn covenant to take up arms against their king and country.

If the Pope pretended to infallibility, they † were moved by the unerring impulse of the Holy Spirit, under whose pretended influence they committed every

\* See Spotswood's History of Scotland. P. 302.

† Ibid. P. 430—31, &c.

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enormity; blasphemously attributing to his inspiration, what they afterwards confessed to be the contrivance of their own evil machinations.

If we now contrast this character with the description of heavenly wisdom, given us by St. James, we shall soon discover the spirit by which these men were actuated. "The wisdom that is from above, says the Apostle, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy; and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." Their wisdom on the contrary was to create discord, to stir up sedition, to speak evil of dignities, to despise dominion—they had bitter envying and strife in their hearts. "This wisdom, says the same Apostle, descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish; for where envying and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work."—Such was the spirit which at this time possessed Scotland.

Upon the union of the two crowns, by the accession of James to the throne of England, the same spirit began to move itself here, and tho' it did not immediately break out into acts of sedition, yet, like pestilential vapour confined within the bowels of the earth, it gave frequent intimations of its fiery nature, till at length, in the reign of his son, it burst forth with such fury as to shake the king from his throne, and to involve law, justice, liberty, and religion, in one common ruin.



It has indeed been frequently asserted, that this tempest was raised by other causes; that the despotic disposition, the arbitrary proceedings, and the tyrannical government of the king, after numberless oppressions patiently submitted to, roused at length the spirit of an injured people in defence of their liberty and laws; that they had frequently applied for redress of grievances; had often petitioned for their rights, had used every method of persuasion and remonstrance without success, before they had recourse to those measures, which a sense of their injuries inspired, and necessity sufficiently justified. But to every unprejudiced person this apology for rebellion will appear as groundless as it is base. Their complaints preceded even their pretended grievances, and continued after those grievances were redressed. They felt indeed one, which to men of their cast will ever be a real grievance; the establishment of episcopacy in the church, and monarchy in the state; of both which their levelling principles were equally subversive.

I mean not to defend every measure taken by the administration, or to justify every expedient they had recourse to in support of government, when the regular and constitutional supplies were unreasonably withdrawn from it. To suppose that they were exempt from the common passions, infirmities, or errors of human nature, would be to forget that they were men: to pretend that in those difficult and perplexing conjunctures they

they exactly regulated every motion by the even hand of justice and prudence, would be in effect to attribute to them a degree of perfection far beyond the reach of human wisdom, or virtue, to attain.

To pursue the history of these troubles thro' all its various scenes, is likewise beyond my present design, which aims only at pointing out the true source of them; and that I am not mistaken in deriving it from the puritanical principles of the times, may be collected from their favorite \* historian. His words are to this effect, " There were two parties (then) in England; the one " consisted of courtiers, and rigid episcopalians, who " being most scrupulously attached to the hierarchy, " firmly believed the Scots were in the wrong to reject " with so much obstinacy this hierarchy, established " thirty years by act of parliament; these looked upon " the Scots as rebels, and wished to see them punished " for their rebellion. The other party was composed " of puritans; under which denomination were in- " cluded not only the church-puritans, but also the " state-puritans (i. e.) all those who were discontented " with the government; and thought the king assumed " a power which belonged not to him. These were " far from disapproving the Scots conduct," tho' (he should have added) at that time in open rebellion against their sovereign. He has here drawn out the contending parties on each side; the rigid episcopalians,

\* Rapin. Hist. d'Angleterre, tom. vii. P. 500.



as he is pleased, seemingly by way of reproach, to call them, on one hand; the church and state puritans on the other. The object of contest was no less than the preservation or abolition of episcopacy and monarchy; the conflict was long and doubtful; the event fatal; fatal to the best of princes, who fell a victim to the rage of his rebellious subjects;—fatal to the guilty nation; whose proud triumph, stained with the blood of their sovereign, brought swift destruction upon themselves, and lasting infamy upon their posterity. I have no inclination to disclose those scenes of horror and confusion which preceded, or followed the bloody deed; when usurpation and tyranny, in just vengeance of their complicated guilt, ruled the people with “a rod of iron, and broke them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” Let me rather divert your thoughts from the impious cruelty of his murderers, to the contemplation of those divine virtues which shone forth in the life and death of the royal martyr.

Perhaps no character in history has been so closely inspected, so severely examined by the eye of malice, as his; and no character has better stood the fiery trial. Not only his public actions, but his most private thoughts, and secret intentions, have been exposed to the view of the world by those, who neither wanted power to discover the truth, nor malevolence to disguise it. And yet after all their misrepresentations, the tongue of slander has been able to cast no reflection upon his royal virtues, but what time and impartial examination have already in a

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great measure obviated, and will, I trust, fully confute. When his private instructions\* to his ministers and Agents, his correspondence with his secretaries, his bosom sentiments communicated without reserve to his most familiar friends, and faithful servants, shall be laid before the public, they will have abundant reason to admire his abilities, to applaud his integrity, to praise his constancy and patience, to celebrate his unshaken attachment to true religion; to deplore his death, and reverence his memory.

In the mean while, this day of public fasting and humiliation will naturally raise in our minds other reflections suitable to the sad occasion of it. It will bring to our thoughts the heavy load of national guilt contracted by our forefathers, which we have reason to fear may yet remain uncanceled in the books of heaven, increased by the additional and complicated sins of their descendants. It will recall to our memory the calamities of those times, when violence and rapine filled the land, and such scenes of slaughter and blood every where presented themselves, as ought, for the honour of our country, to be for ever hid from the human view. It will fill us with a just abhorrence of the principles and practices of those bloody-minded men, who, under the sanctified pretence of promoting the honour of God, committed every cruelty which their own sullen religious malice, or the instiga-

\* To be published in the 2d volume of STATE PAPERS, now in the Clarendon Press.



tion of the devil, could inspire. It should likewise put us on our guard against the attempts of men, who have artfully *revived* those disputes in the church, and clamours in the state, which once terminated in the ruin of these kingdoms.

I pray God we may profit by the fatal experience of former ages, and learn wisdom from the instructive folly of our ancestors! I pray God that even in this our day we may know the things that belong to our peace, before they are hid from our eyes. May we all, animated by that zeal for our religion and love of our country, which inspired the song of the psalmist, unite our wishes and endeavours for the peace and prosperity of our church and nation.—“ O pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee; Peace be within thy walls, and plenteousness within thy palaces! For my brethren and companions sake I will wish thee prosperity; yea, because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek to do thee good.”

And while we behold the bright resemblance of those princely virtues, which adorned the royal martyr, now shining forth in the person of our gracious sovereign, let us earnestly address the throne of mercy, that the guilt of an-ungrateful abandoned people may not cause this sun to be withdrawn from us, nor quench the light of Israel.

F I N I S.

